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NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS—AMERICAN¹

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1. *For what?* The title assumes belief that as a nation we ought to be prepared for *something*. We have not yet found out how many Americans adhere to the possible alternative versions of what that something should be. Evidently the primary job for us as a nation is to find out whether there is something which practically all of us want, or which all of us would want if we were fully informed about the meaning of life, and, if so, how we may get together in expressing this want and in trying to satisfy it.

2. *Resources for answering this question.*—It would be foolish to waste time thinking about the foregoing problem as though it were a mere matter of logic. Nations never have done much of anything in a logical way, that is in the sense of excavating down to ultimate principles and building upon them, and it would be futile to suppose that they will suddenly become scientific. It would be childish to expect that our own nation will make itself an exception to this rule. The task before Americans—those who are aware of it and those who are not, those who care and those who do not care—is to make the most of our resources for knowing our common wants and for progressing toward realizing them. No one can touch a button and set in motion all the machinery that might help Americans toward a common state of mind. The desirable teamwork must come about chiefly through the voluntary co-operation of independent organs for the formation of public opinion. We have vast systems of agencies which are both professedly and actually interested in promoting national welfare as each understands it. The people who are chiefly concerned with one of these systems tend to form ideas as to what national welfare means,

¹ This paper is virtually in continuation of remarks by the writer on the subject, "War and Militarism in Relation to Government," in *Proceedings of the American Sociological Society*, X, 93.

which differ in more or less important details from ideas most prominent elsewhere.¹ They are alike, however, in wanting to serve American national welfare. They are alike in having some sort of regard—again varying greatly in kind and degree—for an assumed something which is of national value; that is, of importance to all the people, over and above the things which they want more especially for themselves or for their more intimate groups. Without attempting to speak of these agencies in the order of their relative importance, we may specify the educational system; the churches; the press; the various economic organizations, both of capitalists and of laborers; the various professional and scientific associations, clerical, legal, medical, engineering, pedagogical, etc., and the respective societies devoted to pure knowledge, physical and social; the different fraternal organizations; the societies and foundations for investigation, relief, and prevention of abnormal social conditions; political organizations, local, state, and national, etc. Each of these in its way acts and avowedly acts in part as a public outlook apparatus. Each has its eye in part upon causes and effects that operate throughout the nation and perhaps beyond. Each is trying to throw a spotlight on certain things which, from its point of view, will sooner or later show importance for Americans in general. Each has some manner of regard for consequences beyond the range of its own immediate group interests. The three tailors of Tooley Street are always first and foremost for themselves; but they have a point of view which is reflected in their version of “we the people of England.” No three tailors of Tooley Street, nor the representatives of any other interest, great or small, are entitled to speak as the nation. Each interest, however, is entitled to speak as a part of the nation, and not merely on the subject of its own special wants, but also on the subject of the whole national life, as seen from the viewpoint of the particular interest. The resultant of all these estimates must at last for better or for worse form the national standard.

3. *How to mobilize the resources.*—In the absence of common control of these agencies for creating or crystallizing public opinion,

¹ Cf. Symposium, “What Is Americanism?” in *Am. Jour. of Sociol.*, XX, 433 and 613.

a feasible plan for utilizing them toward a common result must be a program for energizing their voluntary co-operation. Mr. Carnegie or Mr. Ford might have used more wisely a part of the money that each has used less wisely, if he had subsidized an organization to convince such agencies as we have referred to that the question, *For what?* is vital to our nation, and to induce such agencies to fix their attention on that question until they have agreed upon an answer. Since no such subsidy has been provided, progress must for the present be made by joining voice to voice of those who are aware that the question, *For what?* is vital, until it becomes the fashion for all our American leaders of thought to agitate the question. In season and out of season all far-seeing American men and women ought to force the questions to the front. What ought Americans to aim at? What test should we apply to all policies and programs which demand a franchise among us? Perhaps ridicule may drive some of us into substituting serious thinking for jaunty indifference to the problem. Perhaps some of us are accessible through pride of intellect. It is sorry superficiality to leave such a matter to luck. Sense of duty, economic, political, religious, should be keen enough with many to arrest and hold attention until a constructive national faith has been formed. In spite of the parochialism of our history hitherto, it is incredible that we Americans can hold ourselves so detached from the assaying process which is testing civilization in Europe that we shall still decline the challenge to prove ourselves. All Americans who realize that living together as members of a nation is a physical, mental, and moral experiment should join in creating a national demand for the mobilizing of all our physical, mental, and moral resources upon the efficiency of the experiment. All Americans who realize that the quality of our national life sets the limits for the quality of our individual lives, physical, mental, and moral, should make it their first and foremost public concern to protect national attention against distraction until we have achieved a commanding conception of national destiny.

4. *A common standard of national effort.*—No one has sufficient evidence to justify the assertion that even those agencies of leadership to which reference has been made could unite upon a statement

of belief which might serve as a common starting-point for shaping American co-operation.

It would certainly be preposterous to imagine that a theological or a philosophical formula of our national situation could be constructed which in any near future might command the united assent of all the organizations above indicated. Suppose we restrict our range of thinking, for the present purpose, to the hard realities of our national situation in two of its most literal aspects, our political and our economic activities. Suppose we fix our attention on the question, What kind of political and economic life should we be trying to realize? Of course our question refers not to programs but to standards, to qualities of life which cannot be fitted out with details of procedure in advance, but must gradually develop their own methods of expressing themselves in action.

The best that is possible by way of experimental answer is a proposal which would be accepted as a matter of course by many, but it remains to be seen whether such a proposal can serve as a platform for more intensive American co-operation.

Is it possible for Americans to unite in their underlying political thinking upon some such preconceptions as these:

(1) The human lot is incessant experimentation in using men's endowments so that there will be steady improvement in the circumstances and qualities of people in general.

(2) Nations are at present the most inclusive organizations which we have developed for carrying on this experimentation through co-operation on a large scale.

(3) The national experiment is confused whenever some groups in the nation prove to be subject to comparatively unfavorable terms, or other groups prove to enjoy comparatively favorable terms with reference to participation in such benefits of the experimentation as have already been derived.

(4) The terms of partnership in national experimentation must include, as a minimum *negative* standard of justice, progressive removal of all conditions which tend arbitrarily to handicap certain groups, and of all conditions which tend arbitrarily to prefer certain groups in their respective relations to the common benefits of co-operation.

(5) The terms of partnership in national experimentation must include as a minimum *positive* standard of justice, a policy of progressively extending to each retarded interest, legitimate in itself, insurance that it shall have the support of the nation in gaining its due share of the common benefits of co-operation.

(6) The terms of national co-operation, as a matter of technical efficiency, measured by purely intellectual standards, must include as a minimum, provision for continuous and systematic survey of the whole field of national interests, and publicity of findings in so far as they bear upon further co-operation.

Is it possible for Americans to unite upon some such pre-conceptions as these?

If it is not, then that fact presents our fundamental national problem, in so far as those elements in the nation are concerned whose influence is exerted by rational means. If we are not of one mind upon such primary propositions as these, why not? Is it because of untruth in the propositions, or of mental or moral obduracy in ourselves, or of some more inscrutable reasons? In any event, if we have no common opinion upon these elementary matters, the fact amounts to intellectual and moral anarchy. We are chasing illusions if we suppose we can build a superstructure of secure civilization with no firm foundation of basic unity. If we do not agree upon something that covers the ground of these propositions, all our educational, and religious, and philanthropic, and economic, and political campaigns are an incoherent medley. They not only do not systematically reinforce one another, but they cannot avoid doing much to defeat one another and to frustrate our essential human interests. We are in a pitiable plight so long as we are content with working out theories and programs that attract minor groups, while we fail to make progress toward oneness of national purpose. No one intelligent enough to understand that unity of ethical ideals is essential to unity of moral action is guiltless, if he does not do his part toward realizing American agreement about elementary principles of national co-operation.

5. *The problem for believers in this standard.*—But how does the case stand with those of us who assume substantially the principles

above scheduled? What can we do toward the sort of preparedness to which these principles point? Still more specifically, supposing that the propositions stated above fairly represent our basic social beliefs, what can the readers of this *Journal* do to influence national action accordingly? We are a group in the first place of college teachers. No other single calling is as strongly represented in our number. But there is scarcely a vocation pursued by people of trained and serious minds which has not its quota in this company. To say the least, we are on the whole people of the type who help to make public opinion, rather than the type which merely absorbs the opinions of others. We all do something toward directing currents of thought. If the entire constituency of this *Journal* were of one mind about the problems of national preparedness, and if that single mind were expressed in the common will to get its full share of influence for this group mind, we should together touch so many springs of action that we might be one of the cardinal factors in shaping our immediate national future.

As in the case of every other problem of moral influence, however, the first practical question is, How may we succeed in *fixing attention* upon the values involved? It is a problem of publicity, a problem of advertising, a problem of securing a hearing for the ideas which will win their own way if they are allowed to have a fair field.

This practical question resolves itself into the subordinate question whether we are agreed that this problem of all-around national preparedness is so strategic that we must not fail to make it the focus of our thoughts and efforts; whether it impresses us as so timely and so imperative that it would be the great infidelity if we dissipated our influence upon anything else. It is a question, not of the formula of our belief, but of the intensity of our allegiance to its substance.

Here is the call for social revivalism. Political evangelists of the purest prophetic type might sell their lives in the United States today as dearly as the worthiest of their predecessors in world-history. If the central secret of the scheme of things had been an intention to flash upon the American people a vision of

their actual condition, and of the alternatives for the future, that would galvanize them into redemptive action, the intention could hardly have taken a more revealing shape than we have before us in the European war. If we will not learn from that demonstration, no angel from heaven could teach us anything. The interests that are lodged in men's hearts incessantly strive for realization. They do not stop short until they have been overmastered by other interests wielding superior power. Power belongs to right, but if right does not assert itself, and ally itself with other right, and vindicate itself by appropriating the resources of might, its hour strikes, and it surrenders to termless interregna of wrong.

The United States of America is an assertion that the earth and the fulness thereof belong to the type of people who will not knowingly cloud one another's title to the benefits of this endowment. The United States of America is a resolution to achieve a national life which realizes this principle. Since 1776, however, it has slowly become evident that the complete implications of our national purpose cannot be expressed by the negative terms of its original proclamation. In order completely to appropriate the world and its fulness to the uses of men, the economy of men's relationships to one another must standardize itself in more veracious codes than the opportunist rule "Let alone! Hands off! Every man for himself!" We have discovered that a world literally of every-man-for-himself would be a world of disinherited men. The world and its fulness would have closed the largest and best of its resources to them. The life that our present knowledge of the world invites us to realize is a life of each-for-all-and-all-for each. Our best judgment today is that an economy controlled by this spirit will be just because it will be reciprocal, and it will consequently yield the largest and most fairly distributed dividends.

Unless my reading of the minds of sociologists is utterly at fault, all this is commonplace among us. The only doubt concerns whether and when and how we shall mobilize it. This is frankly an exhortation to concentrate all our energies around two rallying-points. The first of these is the conception that America is a nation in the making. We Americans have not inherited a complete social achievement. We have inherited responsibility

for carrying on a fairly begun social process. Even the oldest portions of the country—say greater New York for instance—are hardly yet aware of the engineering tasks which they must complete before they are equipped to do business on the scale demanded by present conditions. In the country at large, our agriculture, our mining, our manufactures, our transportation, and our merchandizing impress one who has taken thought of our resources as pioneer phenomena, hardly to be regarded as beyond the rule-of-thumb stage. There is not a fraction of our political life, from town or county management to diplomacy, which is not chiefly notable for its crudity—crudity of conception of the functions to be discharged, and crudity of execution. Our economic life is not merely in an apprentice stage technically, but it is stunted by irresolution about liberating itself morally. “Capital” and “labor” in their present status are as impossible in perpetuity as the ancient social division into freeman and slave. Our intellectual life is mostly fooling itself away upon frivolities instead of massing itself upon drives into unconquered regions. Our religious life lacks light and leading, because it spends so much of itself trying to reconcile us to the God who was real to the Holy Roman Empire that it fails to put us in touch with the more real God whom we are yearning to discover.

Just as the profits which a few Americans are making out of the war partially obscure our understanding of the total calamity of war, so our prodigal material prosperity in America has betrayed us into national shallowness about the conditions of prosperity in its full dimensions and in the long run. We have not assimilated the fact that we are so far merely taking the initial steps in national life. We are laying the foundations of our house. We are shaping up plans for a career. We are giving our hostages to fortune. We are forming our national habits and adopting national standards. May we not count on a saving element of Americans who realize that our nation-in-the-making needs all the wisdom anywhere available for assistance in this process? The Chicago city administration is said recently to have reached the conclusion that the question of intramural transportation must be “taken out of politics,” and the ablest engineers in the country must be employed

to draw plans for a scheme of subways to be submitted to the voters. In like manner and on a larger scale, the intelligence of the United States should converge upon the conclusion that our task of continuing the development of our nationality calls for co-operation of all the different kinds of knowledge and skill which the world has thus far developed.

The second of the rallying-points for which I appeal is a verbal symbol for all the foregoing, the word which furnishes the title of this paper and which has suggested the form of the argument, viz., *preparedness*. I urge the practical policy of adopting the word "preparedness" as the slogan of every patriotic movement for more intensive co-operation in achieving worthy American nationality.

Whether as an abstract proposition the word "preparedness" is the best symbol which might be proposed for the purpose is beside the mark. The war has thrust the problem of preparedness in the military sense so insistently upon us that "preparedness" has suddenly become the most central word in the American vocabulary. It is a word to conjure with as much as the words "republican" and "democratic" have been in earlier stages of our history. It is in the first instance, to be sure, a partisan word, just as the words "republican" and "democratic" have been in the larger bulk of American usage. The impulse behind it, however, is far deeper than partisanship. It is the impulse that springs from intelligent or instinctive reference to the belief which I have placed foremost, namely, that we are a people with tasks on our hands, and that we must make ready for them. No more spontaneous evidence to this effect could be possible than the fact that leaders of all shades of thought upon the military problem, from the champions of the biggest army and navy in the world to advocates of literal and complete disarmament, are attempting to commend their various beliefs in terms of "preparedness." It will be good social psychology to make the most of this least common denominator of our present-day patriotism—not for the sake of confusing issues, not for the sake of betraying one another into equivocal positions or entangled programs, but for the sake of facing as one man in the forward direction. The most timely

thing that Americans of good-will can do is to fix on this standard *preparedness* as a proclamation of our common belief that national life is a complexity of problems, and that the only right attitude of the citizen is that of attention to all visible terms of the problems, in wisest provision for future developments.

The vital American question at this moment is whether we are capable of achieving a positive, coherent, constructive national consciousness. It is possible that we may sin away this day of grace by neglecting to use it for saving national consecration. Americans of the responsible and public-spirited type, Americans of equally sincere and devoted allegiance to the nation's welfare, have divergent and in some cases contradictory judgments about ways and means of accomplishing the common purpose. These differences about details are not fatal. In spite of them we may arrive at oneness of will that our nation shall be a community of effort to realize the best in human opportunity. Differences about ways and means will disappear, if we are faithful to the common purpose of finding out what we ought to do and how best to do it. At the present moment, Americans who believe in the fundamentals which have been recited may do most to minimize the losses from cross-purposes, and to reinforce one another's essential loyalty, if all will hold their particular opinions subject to the developing implications of the prophetic standard—*Preparedness*.